The
Adventure

# Arrival

Leafy initially tried not to compare the warm Goiky environment to the frigid Yoyleland domain; it hurt to think of what she'd lost. Yet she found none of her thoughts held warmth anymore.

The sky in Goiky was a brilliant blue, here in Yoyleland it was a surreal dreary yellow. The grass was dry, her home had such soft grass, and it was quite literally greener there. Worst of all was the quiet stillness of this place, it was so empty compared to the loudness of the contestants.

Yoyleland felt like a dream, it was an alternate world almost, it felt detached from reality, so different from any other place in the world. And Leafy was an imposter in this place, her very survival here felt defiant.

At night the already cold landscape was devoured by a much deeper biting coldness that was difficult to ignore. Leafy had quickly developed a routine of building a fire once she saw the sun close to setting.

She'd sharpened her survival skills here in Yoyleland, the hostile environment challenged her, she'd never feared death before, but without any clear idea of how she'd recover if she passed, it felt so much more real.

She felt the warmth of the fire on her metal exterior, her new metal body absorbed the heat. She looked up at the stars in the sky. She thought of the friendships she had lost, she missed having friends. She found herself wishing she was anywhere but here, and most importantly that she could escape this isolation that was slowly numbing her. Exhaustion began overtaking her, pulling her into a restless sleep.

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Leafy awoke to soft grass beneath her, the air was earthy and fresh and the hot sun beamed onto her body, which she noticed was no longer metal. She opened her eyes, the sky was a brilliant blue. Her first thought was this must be some sort of hyper realistic dream. She noticed Coiny, Pin, and Firey waking up near her. She stared at them, her body tensed.

"Why are we in the woods?" Coiny questioned.

The three of them looked around, and froze when they spotted Leafy.

"Leafy? Where are we? Did you do something?" Pin questioned

"I didn't do anything! I woke up here, the same as you!" Leafy argued

"Okay, well where is here?" Firey spoke up

A silence filled the air.

"So none of us know, great" Pin rolled her eyes.

"Hey it's not that bad, we can look around and I'm sure we can-" Leafy was cut off by Pin

"We?"

"Well yeah, we're in a strange place we don't recognize, wouldn't it make sense to stay together?" Leafy questioned

"No no no, you are not coming with us" Pin pushed

"I'm not?" Leafy frowned, a weird sort of silence fell over the group.

"Firey?" Leafy turned to look at Firey, hoping he'd defend her.

"I don't know you" Firey said quickly.

"We are going to figure out where we are, you can do what you want as long as it's away from us" Pin declared, turning to march away.

"I have a bad feeling. I really think we should stick together right now" Leafy insisted.

Coiny stared at her, seemingly contemplating something.

"I think she should stay with us, at least until we figure out where we are," Coiny suggested

"What? That's crazy!" Pin argued

"She doesn't have to stay with us for long, but I feel weird leaving her alone when we don't even know where we are" Coiny persisted.

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The four of them trudged through the unfamiliar forestry. Leafy trailed behind the three as they spoke, her presence here felt so fragile. She attempted to remain quiet and out of sight for the moment, to avoid further rejection.

They found a town, in the center loomed a large castle. "This is the beginning of finding answers," Pin assured, leading the way into town.

There were so many objects in this town, each going about their day.

"The library would be a good place to start" Coiny suggested

"Okay, how do we find it?" Firey asked

Leafy tuned out of the conversation, her eyes wandered the town, she noticed a sales cart, more notably she realized she recognized some of the objects in the cart.

"I'll be back" she said briefly before walking up to the stand.

"Ice Cube!" She tapped the girl's side, the girl turned around and stared at her, her expression was pure confusion.

"How do you know my name?"

"Ice Cube! It's me Leafy" Leafy smiled, but saw no recognition in the others eyes.

"She clearly doesn't know you" Pencil chimed in. Leafy took stock of

the sales carts residents. It had Ice Cube and Pencil, as well as two objects she didn't recognize.

"Freesmart Super Cart" was painted on the side of the large cart.

"Well- you usually do- why don't you now?" Was Ice Cube a good liar? With Firey she could tell he was lying, but none of them seemed to recognize her, and it felt so genuine.

"The Destiny book seems to have brought more in" a book chimed in.

"The what?" Leafy asked

Book sighed "This is sort of long, come in"

Leafy entered the cart, the interior felt so much larger than the exterior. It was set up like a house "Do you live here?" Leafy asked

"We're traveling saleswomen! Living in a cart like this is good for our profession!" A ruby chimed in.

Leafy sat at a table, the book sat across from her.

The other three watched, clearly a bit curious.

"Basically, there are a cast of objects meant to exist in each universe, but ours is missing some. Because of this, the Book of Destiny will pull those objects from other worlds and begin writing them into our world. Because of this objects we have no memory of will appear and somehow know us" Book explained

Leafy tried to process what she was saying, Book saw the confusion on her face and sighed.

"All you need to know is a sorcerer could probably send you back, but that's expensive"

"We have no money, how could we? We just arrived" Leafy spoke

"Then go earn it, there's a tavern nearby with a quest board" Pencil suggested

"Quests?" Leafy asked

The conversation went on. What Leafy gathered was they were in a far more magical world than their home dimension. There were taverns where one could accept quests to earn money. Each object in this world had a 'class' that could be viewed by anyone with enough magical capabilities.

"Ruby can see that stuff, she can tell you all your class" Pencil offered

"Why are you guys helping me?" Leafy asked

"Book just likes explaining things to people, but personally, I want to hear about the drama. So be sure to come back and share it all with us" Pencil urged.

"And of course you can come to us with questions!" Book pushed.

Leafy led Ruby to her group, Ruby looked at each of them, examining.

"Hmm... yes! You are a healer" she poked Leafy "You're a mage!" She tapped Pin's point

She then approached Coiny "Rogue"

She looked at Firey "And the fireman is a fighter"

The irony of being the only support class in a group that didn't want her wasn't lost on Leafy.

Ruby left after that, and Leafy explained to the group what the Freesmarters told her about returning home.

"Okay well, we should start making money then, to go back" Pin decided.

"We?" Leafy felt a smile creep onto her face.

Pin sighed "A healer is necessary, but know you are only with us because you are useful"

"That's fine with me! Thank you!" Leafy beamed.

—-

The tavern was full of the voices of objects. Pin didn't take the time to look around, she marched up to the quest board and began reading them. Leafy could see on her face the noise and crowd was bothering her. She could tell Pin wanted to be in and out of the place as quickly as possible.

Pin snagged a quest with a hefty reward "This looks promising"

Leafy read the quest, some creature had been terrorizing adventurers just outside the kingdom.

"It looks dangerous Pin, we barely know anything about this world" Coiny argued

"We can handle it" Pin insisted

"I'd rather we didn't die immediately" Firey cringed, as a result of having to agree with Coiny.

Pin rolled her eyes and snatched a sheet of paper from the "easy quests" segment of the board.

The quest called for the collecting of various mushrooms from the woods, it seemed rather straightforward.

"Looks like we have our first quest" Leafy smiled

Without a moment's hesitation Pin headed for the exit of the tavern.

# First Quest

Pin had quickly declared herself the leader of the group. No one seemed to have the energy to fight her on it. Good. She was the only one here capable of leading.

They had grabbed a book on foraging from the library. It would aid in their quest, additionally they were all hungry and since they had no money foraging was the quickest option.

Leafy was flipping through the book currently, she had the most knowledge on the subject so Pin had made the strategic choice to let her have the book.

Leafy stopped and bent over, examining some charcoal colored mushrooms.

"These may be the Notshroom, or they could be the Awshroom, both are remarkably similar, according to the book we can check the difference by singing"

"Singing?" Pin questioned

"The Awshroom glows when it hears singing"

Goiky had its share of supernatural plants, but the plants here were ridiculous.

"Ooo I want to do the singing!" Firey offered, without waiting for approval he began singing some off-key garbage.

Coiny started laughing "Is that what you call singing?"

Firey and Coiny began bickering, Pin ignored them.

"The mushroom didn't glow" Pin pointed out

"It has to be good singing to really tell" Leafy whispered

"I will try then"

Pin sang a soft melody, Leafy was the only one who listened. Firey and Coiny were too caught up in their fighting.

The mushrooms illuminated the darkening forest with a soft color shifting hue, shifting from a deep red to a burnt orange, a soft yellow, then a bright green.

"I didn't know you could sing Pin" Leafy smiled

Pin rolled her eyes "I am talented in many areas"

Leafy harvested the Awshroom and Pin checked it off their list.

"If you two are done bickering, the sun is starting to set and once it gets dark looking for mushrooms will be far harder" Pin lectured the two, who looked away, both embarrassed and annoyed.

Leafy explained what they were looking for to the group, by the time the sun set they'd found everything.

Firey essentially functioned as a portable campfire, which was incredibly convenient. Everyone gathered around him as darkness closed in.

Pin found herself staring at Leafy, the warm glow of the fire illuminated her face in a stunning way. Leafy turned her face and made eye contact with Pin, she gave her a smile and Pin looked away. There was something so intense about Leafy's presence, Pin couldn't quite place it but it stirred some foreign emotions within her.

Leafy shivered, she had to stay further from Firey than the others because of how easily flammable she was. Pin felt a surge of pity. No, not pity, duty. Pin was the leader now, and a good leader takes care of the group, regardless of personal opinion.

She moved over to Leafy "I don't want you to catch a cold, so you should sleep with me tonight" Pin suggested

Leafy stared at her "Are you sure?"

"Yes, only because I don't want you getting sick, it'd slow us down"

"Of course Pin"

Pin laid down, and Leafy laid in front of her. Pin wrapped her arms around the girl and pulled her in. She reminded herself this was the practical thing to do, there was nothing more to it.

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In the morning Pin awoke to find the leaf still snuggled against her, she looked peaceful. She noticed Firey and Coiny were both still asleep as well. A shiver traveled through her body. She sensed a dangerous presence nearby. It left her blood cold. She remained still, mentally creating a plan.

She heard a loud movement nearby, her eyes followed the sound and she spotted the side of what appeared to be a brown bear. She closed her eyes and remained still.

Play dead. That's what one is supposed to do.

She felt a stirring next to her and saw Leafy open her eyes. She quickly put a hand over her mouth and gave Leafy an intense look.

Leafy's eyes landed on the bear and she joined Pin in playing dead.

With her eyes closed Pin could no longer see what was happening, but she could hear the bear as it approached them. She peaked at it and felt a panic overtake her. It had the face of an owl. This was no ordinary brown bear, in this case playing dead may not work.

What was that thing?

Pin whispered "We have to get out"

She used her fingers to signal 1, 2, 3 and they both jumped up.

The creature charged towards Leafy, Pin pulled her out of the way. The creature struck her arm, causing blood to sprout from the wound.

Pin winced in pain, she held out her hand and a beam of light erupted from her palm.

The creature glitched out and shattered. Pin stared at the shards.

"What was that?" Pin felt somewhat drained. She noticed a pink petal peeking out from behind a bush and tackled it.

She had grabbed a hold of Flower. Her least favorite object.

"What are you doing here?" Pin scolded

"That should've killed you! How did you destroy my illusion?"

"Illusion? It scratched me!" Pin argued

"It's the illusion of an Owlbear! Idiot!"

"Are you the one who has been terrorizing adventurers around the kingdom?" Pin shoved the quest paper in Flower's face.

"So what if I was?" Flower retorted "Hey what are you doing?"

Pin tied Flower's arms behind her back using some rope.

"I'm turning you in of course!" Pin smiled at Flower, who glared back.

"Leafy, wake up the others, it's time to head back to town" Pin commanded

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As they walked back Leafy kept staring at the scratch on Pin's arm.

"Does it hurt?" Leafy asked

Pin rolled her eyes "I'm fine Leafy."

"Ruby said I'm a healer- I want to try to heal it" Pin watched as Leafy approached her.

"Do you know how?"

"No, but I might as well try"

Leafy focused her energy on the wound, slowly the skin began healing over itself.

Pin touched the now healed spot on her arm, it was like nothing had ever grazed it.

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The reward money from completing two quests was a great start. They each picked up equipment that corresponded to their classes.

There was plenty left, but the price estimations the Freesmarters had given them made it clear they were still far from having the funds they needed.

"I'm so hungry" Firey commented

So far all they'd eaten were the forageables in the forest.

"We have money now, let's eat something nice!" Coiny offered

They got warm bowls of soup from a small food stand and sat at nearby tables.

"Firey, you've been quiet" Coiny commented

"I don't have much to say"

Leafy stared at him, a sad expression on her face.

Pin felt bad for Leafy, and then Pin was annoyed that she felt sympathy for the girl. Leafy was not as nice as she seemed. She was a petty thief. Pin just had to remember that. She had already been too soft with the girl, she wouldn't let herself continue that streak. Leafy could solve her own problems.

"We need to figure out where we'll sleep tonight" Pin decided "Clearly sleeping in those woods is unsafe, and renting will eat away a lot of our money, what we need is something cheap and safe"

"I have an idea" Leafy piped up.

Traveling carts were commonplace among adventurers in this world. They had an enchanted key that they followed, so as long as someone held onto it the cart followed. The inside had all the basic amenities for living. It was perfect.

Pin frowned as a bit more of their money was spent. They'd just earned it and already they'd spent a third of it. The idea of ever affording to go home felt less and less achievable with each purchase.

# The Glass Leaf

Life here had become routine, quest after quest, and then the rewards. They didn't feel much like rewards.

Pin was very particular about saving, any money spent appeared to cause her physical pain. Pin was practical, Leafy ultimately saw it as a good thing. They'd been efficient, mostly spending money on food or equipment. They had sizable savings, soon they'd be able to afford to hire a sorcerer to send them home.

Leafy was on a solo quest, she stared at the list of enchanted flowers she needed to pick. She'd insisted on doing this quest alone, she had this hope that if she could just be useful they could all accept her again. She missed that sincere friendship they used to have, now she felt like an outsider.

As she sat there gently plucking the flowers on her list, she noticed a flower she didn't recognize. It was iridescent and sheer, it looked almost like it was made of glass. Leafy leaned in to get a better look at the captivating flower, before pulling out her magic plants book to attempt to identify it. She was interrupted by a haunting melody, it seemed to come from the flower.

It was like the melody crept into Leafy's very bones and caused each one to crack. It did not hurt, but it felt so uncomfortable, unlike anything she'd felt before. She suddenly felt so aware of everything, the grass felt sharp and she felt delicate. As this new frailness overtook Leafy, she carefully finished picking the flowers. Once she had finished her task she took gentle steps to return home, worried if she wasn't careful she may shatter.

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She tried to walk as normally as she could, easier said than done. She entered their cart and sat on the couch with her hands in her lap.

"Leafy? Why were you walking like that?" Coiny questioned

Leafy stared at him, thinking how to answer. Like her body, her very presence on this team felt delicate.

"Leafy?" Coiny asked, Leafy snapped out of her thoughts "I don't know what happened, this flower shot a light at me and suddenly I felt so fragile, as if I were made of glass, and it hasn't gone away since."

"You look the same, it could be a mental thing" Coiny pondered "Maybe that flower cursed you?"

Pin peaked in from the kitchen "I wasn't eavesdropping. I just happened to overhear while making dinner." Pin said flatly "I think you and Firey should go look for a solution, I'll stay here and watch Leafy" Pin commanded

"Are you sure? I can stay and-" Pin interrupted him

"I have a lot of tasks I need to complete in our cart" Pin insisted

"I don't want to do this with Firey, he's so difficult" Coiny argued

"Your rivalry could cause problems in the future, I think you two should use this to set aside your differences"

Coiny looked like he wanted to argue, but relented.

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Coiny knew the layout of this kingdom far better than when they'd first arrived.

Currently he and Firey walked in silence, Coiny wasn't in the mood to argue and that essentially left no room for conversation between the two.

The normal warmth that radiated off of Firey was gone, he had to eat a yoyle berry to eliminate any risk of him setting the library ablaze. They didn't need the fallout from that on top of the problems they were already dealing with.

Once at the library they skimmed through books on curses, eventually Firey interrupted the silence.

"Hey Coiny, I think I found it"

Coiny peaked at his book, catching sight of an illustration of a flower that resembled a tulip, but had a glassy texture to it.

Coiny read its entry;

Most commonly known as the Glass Flower, this plant is capable of cursing objects into feeling weakened and fragile, as if they are made of glass. It is a purely psychological sensation, it can be cured by medium level curse removal spells.

"Pin can't cast those kinds of spells yet" Coiny frowned

"Hiring someone to fix it would set us back quite a bit, maybe we could just... wait until Pin is high level enough to fix it, I'm sure it wouldn't take too long"

"Yeah that should work" Coiny said

During the walk back Coiny burned with a question, he'd had it for a while. He tried not to get involved in others' problems, but curiosity had overtaken him.

"So Firey, why are you doing this?"

"I don't know what you mean"

"I'm talking about Leafy"

Firey didn't respond, he walked ahead of Coiny and silence overtook the pair once again.

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It felt very strange to see someone as energetic as Leafy stay still like that. It felt almost unnerving in a way. Pin had decided to take a drastic measure in the hopes of bringing back some of Leafy's usual energy.

She placed a slice of cake in front of Leafy.

Leafy stared at it "Really?"

"Don't say anything, just eat it"

Pin had been baking and selling cakes as a way for the group to earn money on the side. She had not let any of her group touch these cakes, anytime someone asked they were met with "You can eat all the cake you want when we get home"

Leafy understood the value of the gesture, she took a bite of the cake, and turned to Pin with a smile. She made eye contact with Pin, even under these circumstances Leafy's gaze had kept it's intensity.

"Thank you, it's delicious"

Pin felt a strange fluttering in her chest, she assumed it to be pride.

It was becoming harder for Pin to make herself hate the girl, it was annoying how likable Leafy was. Pin needed to hold out, trusting Leafy could very well come back to bite her in the future.

"I'm sorry" Leafy said, startling Pin out of her thoughts

"What?" Pin asked

"You look frustrated, did I not appreciate the cake enough? I know I didn't react as strongly as I should, but that's not because I didn't appreciate-" Leafy continued rambling, Pin started tuning her out. She didn't really get what Leafy was saying.

"It's fine, Leafy." Pin's voice was blatantly annoyed

Firey opened the door, hurrying in.

"Hey Firey-" Firey didn't even look at Leafy, he just went to his room.

"That was weird" Pin said

"Not really" Leafy watched Coiny walk in after him.

"What was that?" Pin asked

"Firey was just being himself" Coiny rolled his eyes, joining the pair on the couch

"Hey, you let Leafy have cake? You never let me have any"

"She's sick" Pin argued

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Leafy was not excited about this plan, but she couldn't really do anything about it.

It'd been a week, Leafy felt almost trapped by herself. The curse had left her with an unshakable paranoia, she hadn't stepped outside the cart.

Everyone was acting like everything was normal, Leafy was starting to feel more like a decoration each day. She had an ever-rising urge to stir up problems. Whether by complaining or crying, Leafy wanted to feel like she existed again.

Firey still refused to even acknowledge he knew her, Pin was always keeping herself busy. Coiny and her had never been close.

Leafy was pulled from her thoughts by Pin exiting her room. Pin entered the kitchen and pulled a cake from the freezer, her expression troubled.

Leafy wanted to ask what was wrong, but Pin was so prideful, a direct approach would simply earn her reassurance that everything was fine. She needed to be subtle.

"Hey Pin, is there anything on your mind?" Leafy opened, approaching the kitchen counter.

Pin spared her a glance "The same thing that's been on my mind this entire week" she sighed, before busying herself by lining the cake with icing.

Leafy waited, when Pin didn't continue she prodded "And what's that?"

"Magic is like decorating. It's a precise art, it requires time, skill, and dedication. You can't rush it, and you can't force yourself to be good at it."

So that was what had kept Pin so busy, she was trying to cure her.

"You're not going to be able to heal me for a while, are you?" Leafy said it like a question, but she knew the answer.

The room was quiet, Leafy wished for any words of comfort. Leafy saw the way Pin tensed, she realized she should've let those words remain unspoken.

Pin completely shut down, she didn't say a word to Leafy and finished icing the cake. She was gone the moment she finished.

Leafy felt restless, so she decided to try to be useful. All of the rooms in the cart were incredibly small, so cleaning was fast. Once that was done she busied herself with whatever small tasks she could think of.

The door opened and Firey walked in, Leafy noticed him bleeding and frowned. She approached Firey, whose expression turned blank upon seeing her.

"Hey stranger"

"Your arm"

"I got it during a quest, it can heal on its own"

Firey hadn't let Leafy heal him once. He'd never had any major injuries before, so Leafy had let it slide, but the state of his arm was concerning.

"What happened?"

Firey's face twitched, he looked... embarrassed.

"Seriously, what happened?" Leafy pushed

"Promise you won't laugh?"

"Of course!"

"Bird"

"What?"

"This little bird came at me, it was some sort of magic bird. It kept attacking my arm."

The mental image was hilarious but Leafy had promised not to laugh.

"Let me heal it? The others will ask about it if they see it, do you want to risk that?"

And so for the first time since arriving Firey allowed Leafy to heal him. It felt like progress. Even if his main motivation was simply avoiding humiliation.

"Thanks Leafy" Firey said it so naturally, yet there was nothing natural about it. This felt almost surreal to the leaf who had grown accustomed to the nickname "stranger"

"You said my name"

# Magic Cake

Leafy skimmed through another book of potions, she knew there wasn't a known potion cure for the ailment. So her solution was to simply create one. It was a long shot but Leafy didn't have much to do.

She had a concept cure written in a notebook. Potions were complicated, it was recommended that beginners made the potion recipe in baking form.

—

Pin had made crepes for breakfast, Leafy watched the group talk while she enjoyed the meal.

"Hey Firey, want to come on a quest with me?" Coiny opened

The two seemed to be going on quests together a lot, for two people who hated each other they really couldn't get enough of the other's company.

"What kind of quest?"

"Slimes from that old cave just outside town wander onto people's farms when the population gets too high, so we're doing population control" Coiny explained

"Sure, sounds good"

"You did a great job on these crepes" Leafy said to Pin, trying to lead the subject.

"Thank you, I really am the best" Pin interpreted things the way she wanted to hear them.

"I wish I could bake like you" Leafy continued

"It'd take a long time to reach my level" Pin smiled, clearly enjoying the compliments.

She wasn't getting the hint, Leafy was going to have to be direct.

"Maybe you could teach me"

Pin's eyes lit up at the suggestion "We can start early tomorrow!"

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Leafy felt hands shake her awake.

Pin had warned Leafy she'd have to get up early, but a warning didn't prepare her for this level of exhaustion. A glance out the window revealed it was still dark out.

"The sun isn't even up."

"Exactly, we're not losing to the sun"

Leafy followed Pin into the kitchen. She'd practiced this gentle method of walking to avoid agitating her now sensitive body. Leafy had always been resilient, this new fragility was frustrating, but she was adapting.

They remained as quiet as possible, Firey and Coiny wouldn't appreciate being woken up so early.

"Is waking up this early really necessary?" Leafy whispered

"I like baking before dawn, I'm not changing my schedule for you"

Pins definition of baking lessons was less hands on than Leafy anticipated. So far it simply involved Leafy watching silently while Pin half-explained the process.

Pin was an excellent baker, but teaching was not a skill she possessed.

Leafy quickly took to grabbing ingredients for Pin, it was the most involvement in the process she was currently allowed.

"Did you know you can make potions in cake form?" Leafy questioned

"I've seen a few, they're expensive" Pin commented

"Maybe we could make one"

"I don't want to play with something I don't understand, maybe someday" Pin mused, returning her focus to baking.

—-

Pin continued giving Leafy these lessons early every morning, eventually she felt ready.

No one was home, it was time.

Leafy had bought herself a book of maps awhile back, now was a good opportunity to use it.

"Blue skidoo we can too"

She found herself back at that fateful place where it started. Being primarily inside for the past week made her really appreciate this little grove. Glistening fruit hung from trees that faintly glowed with magic essence.

Wisterias lined the lake, and that captivating glass flower that had started it all once again caught her eye. It looked so innocuous, so innocent, as if it hadn't been the root of Leafy's problems. She was already cursed, what was it gonna do? Leafy walked over and plucked it. She placed the flower in her bag.

She observed the various fruits growing in this grove, she had one fruit on her mind. She walked along the lakeside, observing the trees, and then it caught her eye.

A prismatic fruit, shaped jaggedly. At a glance it could be confused for a crystal, the sun shone through it in a captivating way.

She climbed up the tree, when she tried to pull off the fruit it gave her some resistance. She tugged harder, the fruit detached from the tree suddenly, causing Leafy to lose her balance and crash into the

ground. She laid there motionless, sharp pain running through her, eventually she managed to get back up. This was a good reminder of why she wanted this curse gone. She used the map to return home, one step closer.

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Coiny walked behind Firey, the cave was dark and damp, their only light source the flickering of Firey's flames. There was a dripping noise that grew ever so slightly louder the deeper in they walked.

"Soooo, come here often?" Coiny teased

"This is our first time here?"

"I was jokin-"

A bat flew overhead, Firey screamed and grabbed onto Coiny, causing him to laugh.

"It's not funny!"

"It's a little funny"

When Firey pulled away Coiny felt an involuntary disappointment. The cave was cold and the contact felt so warm.

Silence passed for a bit, the quiet was emphasized by the pointed drip, drip, drip from deeper in.

"What do you think that dripping is?" Firey asked

"Water"

"I mean obviously, I just mean it's a lot of dripping isn't it?"

"We'll find out I guess"

Eventually they found the source, a small pond was inside the lake, with water dripping into it from overhead. Water slimes filled the pond.

"They're cute, I almost feel bad killing them" Coiny mused, leaning

over the lake and watching the creatures swim.

Firey kept a distance from the lake "You'll have to take care of them, I can't go near that water"

"That's fine, it shouldn't be too hard"

Coiny was about to enter the water when a slime grabbed his arm, dragging him under. He flailed in panic before locating the slime and cleanly stabbing it.

He crawled out of the pond and coughed up water onto the cave floor.

"Oh my spark, are you okay?" Firey asked

"I'm fine" Coiny said briefly.

He carefully re-entered the water, and felt his face heat up upon realizing the water was so shallow he could touch the floor.

"I can't believe you nearly drowned in that" Firey laughed

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She used a petal from the glass flower, and carefully saved the rest of the flower in case this didn't work. She included slices of the magic fruit, and vanilla extract, which was apparently very important to all potions.

Leafy admired her cake, it certainly couldn't compete with the cakes Pin made, but she was proud nonetheless.

She heard the door open and turned to see Pin.

"Did you go outside? You look pretty bruised up"

"For a bit, yes" Leafy said briefly, cutting herself a slice off.

Pin examined the cake "The icing is unevenly spread"

"That's okay, it doesn't need to be pretty, it's for me"

Leafy brought her slice to the table.

This could be it, she could be one bite away from finally being healed. Potion effects were always instant, so she'd know immediately if it worked or not.

She took a bite, the soreness in her body remained, she still felt the haunting fragility.

"Leafy? You look sad" Pin commented

Leafy didn't even want to admit to her failed attempt. "Oh it's nothing, I'm just disappointed with how the cake turned out"

"Can I have a bite?" Pin asked

Leafy put a bite into the fork and fed it to Pin.

"I think you put in too much sugar, also this fruit you used has an odd flavor, I wouldn't use it again"

"Oh. Thanks."

"And hey, in the future if you want to go out why don't we go together? I just worry it's not safe for you in your... current state"

"Oh of course Pin" Leafy forced a smile, she'd cry later when she was alone.

"Are you sure you're okay? Maybe talking about it would soothe your feelings" Pin pushed

Leafy felt annoyed at her inability to mask her current sadness, she didn't want to admit everything, it all felt so embarrassing.

"I just really want this curse gone"

# Recipe for disaster

Pin battled her heavy eyelids, fantasies of just going to bed and doing this tomorrow played in her head.

As the leader of the group handling budgeting and planning was her responsibility. She wouldn't put it off until tomorrow, that was irresponsible.

The oven had broken, repairing that was going to dent their funds. Coiny kept losing his pocket knives, and thought taking knives from the kitchen was a fine substitute so now they needed both kitchen and pocket knives. Firey kept setting things on fire, which was quickly adding up.

She added the tasks to her overflowing to-do list, as she was about to put it in her drawer she heard a knock at the door.

"Come in"

Leafy entered the room, and walked towards the table. Pin could tell Leafy was getting used to this curse, initially she'd walked so oddly, but now she walked in a graceful manner. The glass paranoia was still there, but she'd adapted.

"Hey Pin, I was thinking we could go get fruit tomorrow, I want to try making a cake again, but better this time!" Leafy showed Pin a recipe she'd scribbled down.

"That's an odd choice of ingredients" Pin said, squinting

"I'm experimenting! And isn't experimentation an important step in learning?"

Pin shrugged, this recipe certainly wouldn't taste good, but Leafy looked happy about the idea. She'd gently suggest changing the

recipe tomorrow when she had the energy.

Quiet filled the room, Leafy's expression dropped to a frown.

"Firey and Coiny still aren't back, it's getting late"

"They can take care of themselves, Leafy. I think it's too early to start worrying."

"No, no, you're right" Leafy said, sounding uncertain. Her eyes wandered the room, landing on Pin's to-do list.

"That list is getting full" she commented, taking it off the table. "I didn't know we needed new knives, if we got the materials I could just make them!"

"Since when did you know how to make knives?"

"I made a lot of them in Yoyleland, I was bored, it was something to do" Leafy's eyes became distant, as if she were no longer here. She seemed to zone out a bit anytime Yoyleland got mentioned.

Pin hadn't ever really thought about what Leafy did to occupy herself there.

"Okay, we can get the materials tomorrow when we get the fruit."

Leafy looked at Pin, like she wanted to say something.

"What?" Pin asked, sounding ruder than she meant.

"You just... look kinda tired, remember to take care of yourself"

—-

Coiny climbed out of the water upon slaying the final slime. The frigid water clung onto him, only making the already cold cave feel colder. He sat next to Firey, allowing the flame's heat to warm himself up.

Once he'd stopped shivering he realized Firey was asleep. "I can't believe you went to sleep while I was fighting those things."

Firey slept fully laid out, similar to how a cat might. He looked stupid.

Coiny turned his attention to the swollen marks all over his arms and legs, water slimes bites were mildly poisonous. It wouldn't kill him, but it did leave him itchy all over and drain his energy. If he'd known it was going to be water slimes he would've taken Pin instead, though at least Firey made a good heat source.

He was so tired, he turned and saw the water slimes were starting to fall asleep. Sleeping here should be ok, water slimes didn't attack people that weren't near water. They didn't fare well in land combat.

He scooted away from Firey, about as far as he could while still maintaining warmth, and drifted to sleep.

—-

A loud crashing sound pulled the coin out of his sleep, his eyes felt heavy, he tried to fall back asleep but tensed as he heard another crashing sound. He shook Firey until the flame opened his eyes.

"We need to leave."

"Why?" Firey asked, clearly annoyed at being woken up.

"I heard something, deeper in. I have a bad feeling."

"I'm sure it's-"

Another loud crashing sound rang out, Coiny felt Firey tense up. He covered the flame's mouth with his hand before he could scream.

Wordlessly the two hurried out of the cave.

They didn't speak again until they were out of the cave.

"What was that noise?" Firey whispered, as if the creature could somehow hear them.

"I don't know"

"It was so- loud- I didn't like it-"

"Me neither."

Firey remained shaken, long after Coiny had calmed down.

"You're such a scaredy-cat" Coiny smirked

Firey glared at him "You're the one who woke me up over scary cave sounds!"

"Well I'm not the one who nearly screamed when he heard them"

The two continued bickering the rest of the journey home.

—-

Leafy awoke earlier than she'd like, she tried falling back asleep but to no avail. Pin waking her up early most mornings was forcing the leaf to adopt a healthy sleep schedule.

She left her room and entered the kitchen, she saw Coiny buttering a slice of toast. She felt relief flood her, she ran over and hugged him.

"Coiny! I was worried about you!"

"You don't have to worry about me"

Leafy stared at the marks all over him "Oh I'll heal those for you"

Healing them when they came home from quests was the most productive thing she could currently do. The heavenly glow of her magic filled the room as she healed the coin of any poisonous effects.

Once he was healed Coiny smiled at her "Thank you Leafy"

"Does Firey need any healing?"

"No, he didn't do anything, he slept while I did all the work"

"Oh"

"I'm surprised he lets you heal him"

"He didn't at first, now it's the only time I can talk to him. Is he awake?"

"No, neither is Pin"

"Pins asleep? At this time?" A glance at the clock revealed it was 9 am

"It is odd, she's usually up before all of us"

"Maybe I should check on her"

"I think you should just let her sleep, Pin's been burning the candle at both ends. She needs the rest" Coiny said

"You noticed too?"

"Of course, she's my best friend"

—-

Pin felt off when she awoke, like something was wrong. She glanced out the window and realized the sun was up, it was decently high too. She'd slept in.

Humiliation and frustration flowed through her as she exited her room. Leafy and Coiny were talking in the kitchen, they'd both gotten up earlier than her.

What kind of leader got up later than 2/3s of her group?

"Leafy! We have to go, we have a lot to do today"

"Can I tag along?" Coiny chimed in

"Yeah sure" Pin barely processed the question, she was annoyed by the late start. She rushed them out the door, hoping to make up for lost time.

Errand days were always great for Pin, it allowed her to quickly complete tasks from her to-do list. It felt like a weight off her shoulder, and checking things off always felt good.

Despite the unfortunate morning, she found herself settling into a

good mood at the thought of getting things done. Getting materials for the new knives was a good starting point.

"Leafy-" Pin began, before realizing the leaf had completely disappeared.

Her eyes scanned the plaza, but couldn't locate her.

"Where did she go?"

"Who knows? Leafy always wanders off, you'd have to hold her hand to prevent it" Coiny joked.

—-

Leafy had hoped to find the Freesmart cart today, and her wish worked out. Leafy was good at quietly slipping away, if she was quick they wouldn't notice she ever left.

Leafy approached the cart, and saw at the window Bubble.

"Bubble? You weren't here last time"

"I was probably dead! I am, a lot"

"I didn't know revival was possible here" Leafy felt relieved to learn this.

"It is, it's just... hard" Pencil joined them at the window.

"How do you do it?"

"Some healers can do it. I can only do a revival once a month, and Bubble doesn't last a month" Pencil explained

"Some healers?"

"The good ones, so not you"

"Oh"

"No offense, you're a new healer, so you won't be good at it for awhile" Pencil continued

"Hey um, do any of you know about potions?" Leafy messily changed the subject, she was in a rush to get back to her group.

"Yes! I do!" Book chimed in eagerly from deeper in the cart.

Does the entire group just listen to every conversation at the window?

"Oh good- I was wondering-"

"Why don't you come in?" Book hurriedly opened the door.

Leafy didn't want to come inside truthfully, she'd rather just have the conversation at the window. Indoors meant more room for distractions, it meant this would take longer. But it'd be rude to decline, so she walked inside.

"You're walking funny, plant girl" Ruby looked up from her drawing.

"I have the glass curse" Leafy deadpanned, she'd been trying to practice walking normally, so the gem's comment left her annoyed.

"Oh well to fix that you just need a mage, that's not hard at all" Bubble piped in

"Pin isn't high level enough, and it's too expensive to hire someone, so I've been trying to make a potion to cure it."

"There isn't a known potion cure for that" Book responded quickly.

"I am going to invent one, I thought maybe you could check my recipe" Leafy handed her recipe to Book

Book looked over the recipe, her expression harshened.

"This recipe is a mess, clearly you have a very limited understanding of potions. You're not going to be inventing any cures at this rate"

Leafy felt her face warming up, this was embarrassing. "I don't know what I'm doing, but I want to get this right" she gave the book a pleading look.

Book sighed "I can try to rewrite the recipe for you, and make one that might actually work, but" Book held up a finger for emphasis "If I do this for you, you owe Freesmart, and we will collect"

This was definitely a bad idea, she didn't want to owe anyone anything. But what choice did she have? She was done being a burden on her friends.

"Deal."

# Trust Me

"Shouldn't we look for her? Coiny asked

"We're not going to find her, I think we should just continue with our tasks" Pin said

"Is it safe for her to be on her own?"

"No, but I have a feeling she'll rejoin us when she wants to, and no sooner" It was an unfortunate lesson Pin had learned about Leafy long ago, she did what she wanted with little to no warning.

"You know her better than I do, so I'll take your word for it"

They continued with their tasks, it felt good to be productive, to get things done. Pin always enjoyed the feeling that came with completing a task.

That mood was soured by a mild uncomfortable feeling, it was some strange irrational concern. She forced herself to focus all her attention towards her tasks, these emotions got her nowhere. Absorbing herself into the tasks made her feel better, this was productive, this was the correct thing to do.

Eventually, she was pulled from her tasks by Leafy's voice.

"Hello!" Leafy spoke so casually, as if she hadn't just miraculously reappeared.

"Leafy! Where did you come from?" Confusion lined Coiny's voice.

"Leafy! Where were you?" Pin cut in, far more aggressively than Coiny.

Leafy laughed off their concern, unphased by the scolding "Oh don't worry about that, let's just focus on what we need to get done"

Leafy's demeanor was off, at first Pin assumed she was just tired, but that still didn't account for it.

On the surface Leafy was acting cheerful, but Pin sensed odd undertones. As if she was now carrying some weight with her. Pin kept a close eye on the leaf as they continued their tasks.

Leafy really hadn't changed at all.

How did she expect them to trust her if she was running off doing who-knows-what?

—-

They had dropped by the cart to drop off everything they'd purchased.

"Leafy, come help me put away the baking supplies." Pin demanded, this was her opportunity to get answers from the leaf. Maybe she just didn't want to talk about it in front of Coiny.

Leafy followed Pin into the kitchen, and they began putting away the supplies.

"Now that it's just us, where did you go?" Pin was never one for the subtle approach.

"I was meeting with some people"

"Who?"

"Acquaintances"

"Why?"

"I wanted information"

"On what?"

"Anything really"

Leafy was frustratingly good at being vague, if Leafy didn't want to volunteer this information Pin would have a difficult time getting it

from the girl. Pin watched Leafy, it was frustrating that she could never read the plant.

Pin tensed up as Leafy placed the flour in the cabinet.

"You put the flour in the wrong spot." Pin said pointedly

"I thought it went in this cabinet?"

"It does, but it goes on the first shelf, who in their right mind would put the flour on the second shelf?"

Leafy laughed as she moved the flour to correct spot "Pin, you're so funny"

Pin blinked "What do you mean?"

—-

Exhaustion was a funny thing, Leafy could ignore it for a long time, but when she entered a calm enough environment it tended to hit all at once.

Within Leafy each of her muscles ached, moving hurt. Moving didn't used to hurt like this, but the longer she had this curse the worse it seemed to get.

She didn't expect running errands to take this much out of her, but she couldn't let it show. She put on a practiced smile. If she ignored her pain it didn't exist.

Just one more task. The most important one. Finally getting the fruit for her recipe.

As Leafy approached the door to head back out she stumbled, leaning against Pin for support. Pin gave her a concerned look as she held her up "Are you okay?"

Leafy steadied herself "I'm fine."

Leafy tried to walk forwards, but her body seemed to be fighting against her. Pin steadied the leaf "You overexerted yourself, you need

to rest, we can get the fruit once you feel better." Pin said the words firmly, it stung.

"No, I'm really fine Pin" Leafy argued

"Leafy, no good will come from you overexerting yourself" Pin insisted

"I will not hear that from you"

"What is that supposed to mean?"

"Last night was the first time I've seen you get a regular amount of sleep since we arrived."

"That's different, I'm the leader. Taking care of things is my responsibility." Pin argued "And taking care of you falls under that responsibility, by the way"

"Take care of yourself first, you look exhausted"

"I function my best when I'm on very little sleep. And this isn't relevant to our current issue. You're going to rest, and if you seem better by tomorrow we can go out again."

Leafy opened her mouth to protest, but Pin cut her off.

"As team leader, I'm putting my foot down. We aren't arguing over this anymore."

—-

Despite arguing Pin on the matter, Leafy passed out almost immediately upon entering her room. When she woke up it was dark out. She closed her eyes wishing to fall back asleep, but to no avail. Her head throbbed with pain and her throat felt dry.

She stared at the ceiling as her eyes adjusted to the dark, contemplating the cause.

Headaches were a sign she'd forgotten to attend to some bodily need. This was an unfortunate side effect of being forgetful.

Usually it meant she needed to eat something. Or drink water. Or go to sleep.

She was certainly thirsty. And hungry. She was definitely hungry. Two thirds of her primary needs not met.

She didn't want to get up, but the headache became more irritating as time passed.

She made her way to the kitchen, and paused when she realized the room was already occupied by Pin. She considered just returning to her room, but Pin noticed her before she could retreat.

"Leafy, how're you feeling?"

Leafy forced herself to smile "I am feeling better already!" Everything hurt, but no one else needed to know that.

Pin looked at her skeptically "I can't say I believe you."

Leafy sighed "It'd be nice if you did"

"I wish I could, but you're never open with me about anything."

"I am open about things"

"Where were you today? When you disappeared without telling us?"

A silence hung in the air, Leafy shifted uncomfortably. Eventually Pin broke the quiet, her voice laced with disappointment.

"I'm not going to tell you what to do, but trust goes both ways. If you can't trust me, I can't trust you"

"I was alone before we woke up here. I'm not really... used to being anything other than self-reliant anymore" It was the best way for Leafy to explain it

"I'm sorry" Pin said, her voice more sincere than Leafy was used to "I'm sorry about how things went, I'm sorry you were alone"

Leafy tensed up, she hadn't expected that. She moved forward,

pulling Pin into a hug. Pin was frozen for a few seconds before returning the affection.

Leafy couldn't remember her last hug.